



WE SING AMERICA

PLANET WORD CELEBRATES THE 4TH OF JULY

Media Sponsor:

WAMU 88.5
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RADIO

JULY 4, 2026

FRANKLIN PARK | WASHINGTON, D.C.

PRESENTED BY
PLANET WORD

MUSICAL DIRECTION BY
NOLAN WILLIAMS, JR.

HOSTED BY
ESTHER CIAMMACHILLI



A STATEMENT FROM PLANET
WORD ON JULY 4, 2026

Planet Word was founded in the belief that words matter, so on this historic day, 250 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we urge all Americans to rededicate themselves to those words — to building a more perfect union, one in which we are all created equal and endowed with unalienable rights, to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And let us raise our voices in harmony and community as we pledge *e pluribus unum*. Out of many one.



ANN FRIEDMAN
Founder and CEO



PHOTO CREDIT: MAGDALENA PAPAIOANNOU

WHY WE SING

* * *

Long before microphones, recordings, and streaming services, communities gathered to sing together.

Singing transforms listeners into participants. It creates connection among strangers and reminds us that every voice contributes to something larger than itself.

On this Independence Day, we celebrate not only our nation's history, but also the enduring power of community, conversation, song, and shared expression.

These songs invite us to reflect on freedom, belonging, hope, courage, service, and the ongoing work of building a more perfect union.

PRESENTED BY

Planet Word

PRODUCED BY

Thirty-Fifth Productions

MUSICAL DIRECTION & ARRANGEMENTS

Nolan Williams, Jr., NEWorks Productions

HOST

Esther Ciammachilli, WAMU

NEWORKS VOICES OF AMERICA & BAND

Karla Rivera Curtis

Marissa Harris

Dwayne Pinkney

Daniel J. Smith

Jaquay Smith

Amber Wood

Oliver Dyer, *guitar*

Jeff Issokson, *violin*

Warren Jones, *keys*

Ben Kolakowski, *guitar*

Chris Lewis, *keys*

Bryan Lilley, *keys*

William "Speedy" Truss, *set percussion*

SPECIAL GUEST VOCALIST

Rayshun Lamarr

PRODUCTION TEAM

Matthew Winer & Justin Ellis, *executive producers*

Rich Ching, *producer*

Tom Pipkin, *production management*

SPECIAL THANKS

Ann Friedman, *Planet Word Founder & CEO*

Nikki DeJesus Sertsu, *Planet Word Executive Director*

WAMU, *media sponsor*



PROGRAM

Prelude: “The Stars and Stripes Forever”

John Philip Sousa

“The Star-Spangled Banner”

“Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”

“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”

“If I Had a Hammer”

“Someday We’ll All Be Free”

“God Bless America”

“Home on the Range”

“This Land Is Your Land”

“Blowin’ in the Wind”

“Freedom”

*An improvised word activation,
led by Nolan Williams, Jr.*

“O-o-h Child”

“Oh Shenandoah”

A Salute to the Armed Services

“The Army Goes Rolling Along”

“The Marines’ Hymn”

“Semper Paratus [Always Ready]”

“Anchors Aweigh!”

“The U.S. Air Force”

“A Change Is Gonna Come”

“Take Me Home, Country Roads”

“America the Beautiful”





SONG LYRICS

“The Star-Spangled Banner”

Words by Francis Scott Key

Setting by Nolan Williams, Jr.

O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the
twilight's last gleaming,

Whose broad stripes and bright stars
through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched,
were so gallantly streaming?

And the rockets' red glare, the
bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that
our flag was still there;

O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and
the home of the brave?

“Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing”


Words by James Weldon Johnson

Music by J. Rosamond Johnson

Setting by Nolan Williams, Jr.

VERSE 1

Lift ev'ry voice and sing 'til earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that
the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that
the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.



VERSE 2

Stony the road we trod, Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat, Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with
tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path through
the blood of the slaughtered.
Out from the gloomy past 'til now we stand at last
where the white gleam of our bright star is cast

VERSE 3

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places
our God where we met Thee
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine
of the world, we forget Thee.
Shadowed beneath Thy hand
may we forever stand
True to our God, true to our native land.



“My Country, 'Tis of Thee”

Words by Samuel Francis Smith

Setting by Nolan Williams, Jr.

VERSE 1

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring!

VERSE 2

My native country, thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I love
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills
Like that above.

VERSE 3

Let music swell the breeze
And ring from all the trees
Sweet freedom's song
Let mortal tongues awake;
Let all that breathe partake;
Let rocks their silence break,
The sound prolong.

VERSE 4

Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King.

REPEAT AS DIRECTED

Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring!

ON CUE

Let freedom ring!

“If I Had a Hammer”

Written by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays

VERSE 1

If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning
I'd hammer in the evening, all over this land
I'd hammer out danger, I'd hammer out a warning
I'd hammer out love between my brothers
and my sisters all over this land

VERSE 2

If I had a bell, I'd ring it in the morning
I'd ring it in the evening, all over this land
I'd ring it in danger, I'd ring out a warning
I'd ring in love between my brothers
and my sisters all over this land

VERSE 3

If I had a song, I'd sing it in the morning
I'd sing it in the evening, all over this land
I'd sing it in danger, I'd sing out a warning
I'd sing in love between my brothers
and my sisters all over this land

VERSE 4

Well, I got a hammer and I got a bell
And I got a song to sing all over this land
It's the hammer of justice, it's the bell of freedom
It's a song about love between my brothers
and my sisters all over this land

“Someday We’ll All Be Free”

Written by Edward Howard and Donny Hathaway

Hang on to the world as it spins around
Just don’t let the spin get you down
Things are moving fast
Hold on tight and you will last

Keep your self respect, your manly pride
Get yourself in gear
Keep your stride
Never mind your fears
Brighter days will soon be here
Take it from me, someday we’ll all be free, yeah

Keep on walking tall
Hold your head up high
Lay your dreams right up to the sky
Sing your greatest song
And you’ll keep going, going on
Take it from me, someday we’ll all be free

INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE

Keep on walking tall
Hold your head up high
Lay your dreams right up to the sky
Sing your greatest song
And you’ll keep going, going on
Take it from me, someday we’ll all be free
Hey, just wait and see, some day
we’ll all be free, yeah

REPEAT AS DIRECTED

Take it from me, someday we’ll all be free
someday we’ll all be free
Take it from me, take it from me, take it from me

“God Bless America”

Written by Irving Berlin

Setting by Nolan Williams, Jr.

VERSE

While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that’s free,
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer.

REFRAIN

God Bless America,
Land that I love.
Stand beside her, and guide her
Thru the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America, My home sweet home.





“Home on the Range”

Traditional American song

REFRAIN

Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

VERSE 1

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

VERSE 2


Where the air is so pure, and the zephyrs so free,
The breezes so balmy and light,
That I would not exchange my home on the range,
For all of the cities so bright.

VERSE 3

How often at night, when the heavens are bright
With the light from the glittering stars,
Have I stood there amazed and asked as I gazed,
If their glory exceeds that of ours.

VERSE 4

Oh give me a land where the bright diamond sand,
Flows leisurely down in the stream;
Where the graceful white swan goes gliding along,
Like a maid in a heavenly dream.



“This Land Is Your Land”

Written by Woody Guthrie

REFRAIN

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York island,
From the redwood forest to the
Gulf Stream waters;
This land was made for you and me.

VERSE 1

As I was walking that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway;
I saw below me that golden valley;
This land was made for you and me.

VERSE 2

I've roamed and rambled and I
followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;
And all around me a voice was sounding;
This land was made for you and me.

VERSE 3

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling,
And the wheat fields waving and
the dust clouds rolling,
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting:
This land was made for you and me.

“Blowin’ in the Wind”

Written by Bob Dylan

VERSE 1

How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, and how many times must
the cannonballs fly
Before they’re forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind
The answer is blowin’ in the wind

VERSE 2

Yes, and how many years must a mountain exist
Before it is washed to the sea?
Yes, and how many years can some people exist
Before they’re allowed to be free?
Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head
And pretend that he just doesn’t see?
The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind
The answer is blowin’ in the wind

VERSE 3

Yes, and how many times must a man look up
Before he can see the sky?
Yes, and how many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
Yes, and how many deaths will
it take ‘til he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind
The answer is blowin’ in the wind

REPEAT AS DIRECTED

The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind
The answer is blowin’ in the wind

“O-o-h Child”

Written by Stan Vincent

VERSE

Ooh child
Things are gonna get easier
Ooh child
Things’ll get brighter
Ooh child
Things are gonna get easier
Ooh child
Things’ll get brighter

REFRAIN

Some day, yeah
We’ll put it together and we’ll get it undone
Some day
When your head is much lighter
Some day, yeah
We’ll walk in the rays of a beautiful sun
Some day
When the world is much brighter

BRIDGE (ON CUE, REPEAT AS DIRECTED)

Right now
Right now

VAMP (REPEAT AS DIRECTED)

Things are gonna get better
Right now!

CODA (ON CUE)

Things are gonna get better!



“Oh Shenandoah”

Traditional American folk song

Setting by Nolan Williams, Jr.

Oh Shenandoah, I long to hear you,
Away, you rolling river.

Oh Shenandoah, I long to hear you,
Away, I'm bound away,
'Cross the wide Missouri.

A Tribute to Armed Services

Setting by Lloyd Larson

THE ARMY GOES ROLLING ALONG

Words and music by Edmond L. Gruber

Words adapted by H.W. Arberg


First to fight for the right
And to build the Nation's might
And the Army goes rolling along
Proud of all we have done
Fighting till the battle's won
And the Army goes rolling along

Then it's hi, hi, hey
The Army's on its way
Count off the cadence loud and strong
(SPOKEN) Two, three, four, hut, two, three
For where'er we go
You will always know
That the Army goes rolling along

THE MARINES' HYMN

Words and music by Jacques Offenbach

From the Halls of Montezuma
To the Shores of Tripoli;
We fight our country's battles
In the air, on land and sea;
First to fight for right and freedom
And to keep our honor clean;
We are proud to claim the title
of United States Marine.



SEMPER PARATUS [ALWAYS READY]

Words and music by Capt. Francis S. Van Boskerck

We're always ready for the call
We place our trust in Thee
Through surf and storm and howling gale
High shall our purpose be
Semper Paratus is our guide
Our fame, our glory too
To fight to save or fight and die
Aye, Coast Guard, we are for you

ANCHORS AWEIGH!

*Words and music by Alfred H. Miles, U.S.N. (Ret.)
and Charles A. Zimmerman*

Revised lyric by George D. and Charles Lottman

Anchors aweigh, my boys
Anchors aweigh
Farewell to foreign shores
We sail at break of day-ay-ay-ay
Through our last night ashore
Hail to the foam
Until we meet once more
Here's wishing you a happy voyage home

THE U.S. AIR FORCE

Words and music by Robert Crawford

Off we go into the wild blue yonder,
Climbing high into the sun;
Here they come zooming to meet our thunder,
At 'em boys, give 'er the gun
Down we dive spouting our flame from under
Off with one helluva roar!
We live in fame or go down in flame, hey!
Nothing'll stop the U.S. Air Force!

CODA

America, America!

“A Change Is Gonna Come”

Written by Sam Cooke

I was born by the river
In a little tent
Oh, and just like the river, I've been running
Ever since
It's been a long
A long time coming, but I know
A change gon' come
Oh yes, it will

It's been too hard living
But I'm afraid to die
'Cause I don't know what's up there
Beyond the sky
It's been a long
A long time coming, but I know
A change gon' come
Oh yes, it will

I go to the movie
And I go downtown
And somebody keep telling me
“Don't hang around”
It's been a long
A long time coming, but I know
A change gon' come
Oh yes, it will

Then, I go to my brother
And I say, “Brother, help me, please”
But he winds up knockin' me
Back down on my knees, oh

There been times that I thought
I couldn't last for long
But now, I think I'm able
To carry on

It's been a long
A long time coming, but I know
A change gon' come
Oh yes, it will

“Take Me Home, Country Roads”

*Written by Bill Danoff, Taffy Nivert,
and John Denver*

VERSE 1

Almost Heaven, West Virginia
Blue Ridge Mountains, Shenandoah River
Life is old there, older than the trees
Younger than the mountains, growin' like a breeze

REFRAIN

Country roads, take me home
To the place I belong
West Virginia, mountain mama
Take me home, country roads

VERSE 2

All my memories gather 'round her
Miner's lady, stranger to blue water
Dark and dusty, painted on the sky
Misty taste of moonshine, teardrop in my eye

REFRAIN

BRIDGE

I hear her voice in the mornin' hour, she calls me
The radio reminds me of my home far away
Drivin' down the road, I get a feelin'
That I should've been home yesterday, yesterday

REFRAIN

“America the Beautiful”

Words by Katharine Lee Bates

Music by Samuel A. Ward

Setting by Ray Charles

O beautiful for heroes proves
In liberating strife
Who more than self, their country loved
And mercy more than life
America, America, may God thy gold refine
‘Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divined.

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!





NETWORKS VOICES OF AMERICA & BAND

The NEWorks Voices of America & Band is a collective of diverse community vocalists and musicians assembled by NEWorks Productions since 2009 to perform for major national events. Standout performances include the Andrea Bocelli World Tour (2015–2024), the Anti-Defamation League’s 25th Anniversary Concert Against Hate, performing with Kate Davis, Maestro Emil de Cou, and the National Symphony Orchestra; the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize, performing with Patti LaBelle; and the 2018 MLB All-Star Game.

Nolan Williams, Jr., *music director*

Karla Rivera Curtis
Marissa Harris
Dwayne Pinkney
Daniel J. Smith
Jaquay Smith
Amber Wood

Oliver Dyer, *guitar*
Jeff Issokson, *violin*
Warren Jones, *keys*
Ben Kolakowski, *guitar*
Chris Lewis, *keys*
Bryan Lilley, *keys*
William “Speedy” Truss, *set percussion*

SPECIAL GUEST VOCALIST

Rayshun Lamarr





NOLAN WILLIAMS, JR.

Nolan Williams, Jr. is best described as a creative force. A producer, artistic director, composer-lyricist, playwright, filmmaker, musicologist, and cultural curator, Williams has built a career dedicated to illuminating stories of cultural significance, advancing social justice, and fostering meaningful civic dialogue through the arts. His expansive body of work includes choral and orchestral compositions premiered by major American orchestras and the London Symphony Orchestra; music for television; the bestselling *African American Heritage Hymnal*, with more than 500,000 copies sold worldwide; songwriting credits on two Grammy-nominated projects; arts and educational initiatives produced in partnership with The Kennedy Center, Philadelphia’s Mann Center, and Orlando’s Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts; cultural programming developed with the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Department of State, and numerous international embassies; award-winning documentary and short film projects; and a catalog of theatrical works, including his critically acclaimed musical *GRACE*, which premiered at Ford’s Theatre in 2022.

Based in Washington, D.C., Williams is the founding CEO of NEWorks Productions. His work has earned more than 150 national and international honors, including “Best Music Video” at the 2026 New York Short Film Festival and “Best Director — Animation Music Video” at the 2025 Cannes Film Awards. nolanwilliamsjr.com



ESTHER CIAMMACHILLI

Esther's last name is pronounced CHAH-mah-KEY-lee and it's Italian, if you're wondering.

Esther is the local host of *Morning Edition* on WAMU 88.5. She presents local news updates from the WAMU newsroom, along with feature stories and conversations with newsmakers from around the Washington region.

She first joined WAMU as a host/reporter in March 2018. Esther came to WAMU via WBHM in Birmingham, Alabama, where she was the host of *All Things Considered* and a reporter. She graduated from the Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno, and was the afternoon host at Reno Public Radio while getting her degree. Before returning to college, Esther was an actress and a singer in Las Vegas.

She's a native Californian, originally from San Diego. When she's not working, Esther enjoys traveling, reading, and sometimes sitting in absolute silence (because the world is kind of loud these days).



PLANET WORD

A 2025 Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice Award winner, Planet Word is the only museum in the country dedicated to renewing and inspiring a love of words, language, and reading in visitors of all ages. Located in the historic Franklin School on the corner of 13th and K Streets in downtown D.C., Planet Word opened in 2020 as a new kind of interactive and self-guided museum. Using the museum's state-of-the-art technology, visitors determine their experience through their own words and choices.

Planet Word is a bold and imaginative response to the life-long importance of literacy and to the challenge of growing a love of language. As a private, non-governmental museum, Planet Word is free for visitors and supported primarily by the generosity of donors. www.planetwordmuseum.org





THIRTY-FIFTH PRODUCTIONS

Named in tribute to the legacy of American cultural leadership, Thirty-Fifth Productions develops bold, artist-driven experiences that connect the performing arts with today's audiences. Founded by Justin Ellis and Matthew Winer, the company builds on more than two decades of leadership at the Kennedy Center and the National Symphony Orchestra, where its founders produced nationally broadcast events, major cross-genre collaborations, and large-scale cultural initiatives.

Thirty-Fifth creates original touring productions, represents conductors and creative talent, produces concerts and special events, advises cultural organizations on programming and institutional strategy, and develops broadcast and digital media projects that extend the reach of live performance. Clients and partners include the New York Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Center Theatre Group, Strathmore Music Center, Gamiotics, IMG Artists, and Rick Steves' Europe, among others. By combining artistic vision with strategic thinking, Thirty-Fifth is helping shape a more innovative, sustainable, and connected future for the performing arts. www.thirty-fifth.com



ONE NATION. MANY VOICES.

Thank you for joining us for
We Sing America.

May these songs continue to
be shared around tables, in
living rooms, at celebrations,
and in communities for
generations to come.

Happy Fourth of July!

PLANET
WORD

